

# Mahahatthipadopama Sutta (MN#28)

## - The Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint

by Bhikkhu Bodhi

*[This is taken from the translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi of the "Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha", with the ditto marks removed and placed back into it's entirety again for the purpose of study.]*

1] Thus have I heard. On one occasion the Blessed One was living at Savatthi in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's Park. There the Venerable Sariputta addressed the Bhikkhus thus: "Friend, bhikkhus." - "Friend," they replied. The Venerable Sariputta said thus:

2] "Friends, just as the footprint of any living thing that walks can be placed within an elephant's footprint, and so the elephant's footprint is declared the chief of them because of its great size; so too, all wholesome states can be included in the Four Noble Truths. In what four? In the noble truth of suffering, in the noble truth of the origin of suffering, in the noble truth of the cessation of suffering, and in the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

3] "And what is the noble truth of suffering? Birth is suffering, ageing is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; not to obtain what one wants is suffering; in short, the five aggregates affected by clinging are suffering.

4] "And what are the five aggregates affected by clinging? They are: the material form aggregate affected by clinging, the feeling aggregate affected by clinging, the perception aggregate affected by clinging, the formations aggregate affected by clinging, and the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging.

5] "And what is the material form aggregate affected by clinging? It is the four great elements and the material form derived from the four great elements. And what are the four great elements? They are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.

### ( The Earth Element )

6] "What, friends, is the earth element? The earth element may be either internal or external. What is the internal earth element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to: that is head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to: this is called the internal earth element. Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self'. When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the earth element.

7] "Now, there comes a time when the water element is disturbed and then the external earth element vanishes. When even this external earth element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts for a little while? There can be no considering that as 'I' or 'mine' or 'I am'.

8] "So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus: 'This painful feeling born of the ear-contact has arisen in me. That is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact. Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that perception is impermanent, that formations are impermanent, and that consciousness is impermanent. And his mind, having entered into that very objective support, enters into [taking it to be impersonal] and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution.

9] "Now, if others attack that bhikkhu in ways that are unwished for, undesired, and disagreeable, by contact with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, he understands thus: 'This body is of such a nature that contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail it. But this has been said by the Blessed One in his 'advice on the simile of the saw': 'Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb from limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be following my teaching.' So tireless energy shall be aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness established, my body shall be tranquil and untroubled, my mind concentrated and unified. And now let contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail this body; for this is just how the Buddha's teaching is practiced."

10] "When that Bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency thus: 'It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me, it is bad for me, it is no good for me, that when I thus recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity is supported by the wholesome does not become established in me.' Just as when a daughter-in-law sees her father-in-law, she rouses a sense of urgency [to please him], so too, when that bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he rouses a sense of urgency. But if, when he recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome becomes established in him, then he is satisfied with it. At that point, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu

### **(The Water Element)**

11] "What, friends, is the water element? The water element may be either internal or external. What is the internal water element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to; that is, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil-of-the-joints, urine, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is water, watery, and clung-to: this is called the internal water element. Now both the internal water element and the external water element are simply water element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self'. When one sees as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the water element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the water element.

12] "Now there comes a time when the external element is disturbed. It carries away villages, towns, cities, districts, and countries. There comes a time when the waters in the great ocean sink down, a hundred leagues, two hundred leagues, three hundred leagues, four hundred leagues, five hundred leagues, six hundred leagues, seven hundred leagues. There comes a time when the waters in the great oceans stand seven fathoms deep. There comes a time when the waters in the great oceans stand half a fathom deep, only waist deep, only knee deep, only ankle deep. There comes a time when the waters in the great oceans are not enough to wet even the joint of a finger. When even the external water element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung-to by craving and lasts but a little while? There can be no considering that as 'I' or 'mine' or 'I am'.

13] "So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus: 'This painful feeling born of the ear-contact has arisen in me. That is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact. Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that perception is impermanent, that formations are impermanent, and that consciousness is impermanent. And his mind, having entered into that very object [taking it to be impersonal] and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution.

14] "Now, if others attack that bhikkhu in ways that are unwished for, undesired, and disagreeable, by contact with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, he understands thus: 'This body is of such a nature that contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail it. But this has been said by the Blessed One in his 'advice on the simile of the saw': 'Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb from limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be following my teaching.' So tireless energy shall be aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness established, my body shall be tranquil and untroubled, my mind concentrated and unified. And now let contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail this body; for this is just how the Buddha's teaching is practiced."

15] "When that Bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency thus: 'It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me, it is bad for me, it is no good for me, that when I thus recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity is supported by the wholesome does not become established in me.' Just as when a daughter-in-law sees her father-in-law, she rouses a sense of urgency [to please him], so too, when that bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he rouses a sense of urgency. But if, when he recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome becomes established in him, then he is satisfied with it. At that point, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

### **(The Fire Element)**

16] "What, friends, is the fire element? The fire element may be either internal or external. What is the internal fire element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung-to: that is, that by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, ages, consumed, and tasted gets completely digested, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, fire, fiery, and clung-to: this is called the internal element are simply called fire element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.' When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the fire element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the fire element.

17] "Now there comes a time when the external fire element is disturbed. It burns up villages, towns, cities, districts, and countries. It goes out due to lack of fuel only when it comes to green grass, or to a road, or to a rock, or to water, or to a fair even space. There comes a time when they seek to make a fire even with a cock's feather or a hide-

pairing. When even this external fire element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a little while? There can be no considering that as 'I or mine' or 'I am'.

18] "So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu (who has seen this element as it actually is), he understands thus: "So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus: 'This painful feeling born of the ear-contact has arisen in me. That is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact. Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that perception is impermanent, that formations are impermanent, and that consciousness is impermanent. And his mind, having entered into that very object [taking it to be impersonal] and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution.

19] "Now, if others attack that bhikkhu in ways that are unwished for, undesired, and disagreeable, by contact with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, he understands thus: 'This body is of such a nature that contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail it. But this has been said by the Blessed One in his 'advice on the simile of the saw': 'Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb from limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be following my teaching.' So tireless energy shall be aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness established, my body shall be tranquil and untroubled, my mind concentrated and unified. And now let contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail this body; for this is just how the Buddha's teaching is practiced."

20] "When that Bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency thus: 'It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me, it is bad for me, it is no good for me, that when I thus recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity is supported by the wholesome does not become established in me.' Just as when a daughter-in-law sees her father-in-law, she rouses a sense of urgency [to please him], so too, when that bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he rouses a sense of urgency. But if, when he recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome becomes established in him, then he is satisfied with it. At that point, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

#### [Air Element]

21] "What, friends, is the air element? The air element may be either internal or external. What is the internal air element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung-to; that is, up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, clung-to; This is called air element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: 'This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self'. When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted toward the air element.

22] "Now there comes a time when the external air element is disturbed. It sweeps away villages, towns, cities, districts, and countries. There comes a time in the last month of the hot season when they seek wind by means of a fan or bellows, and even the strands of straw in the drip-fringe of the thatch do not stir. When even this external air element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance, and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a little while? There can be no considering that as 'I' or 'mine' or 'I am'.

23] "So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu (who has seen this element as it actually is), he understands thus: "So then, if others abuse, revile, scold, and harass a bhikkhu [who has seen this element as it actually is], he understands thus: 'This painful feeling born of the ear-contact has arisen in me. That is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact. Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that perception is impermanent, that formations are impermanent, and that consciousness is impermanent. And his mind, having entered into that very object [taking it to be impersonal] and acquires confidence, steadiness, and resolution.

24] "Now, if others attack that bhikkhu in ways that are unwished for, undesired, and disagreeable, by contact with fists, clods, sticks, or knives, he understands thus: 'This body is of such a nature that contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail it. But this has been said by the Blessed One in his 'advice on the simile of the saw': 'Bhikkhus, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb from limb with a two-handed saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be following my teaching.' So tireless energy shall be aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness established, my body shall be tranquil and untroubled, my mind concentrated and unified. And now let contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail this body; for this is just how the Buddha's teaching is practiced."

25] "When that Bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he arouses a sense of urgency thus: 'It is a loss for me, it is no gain for me, it is bad for me, it is no good for me, that when I thus recollect the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity is supported by the wholesome does not become established in me.' Just as when a daughter-in-law sees her father-in-law, she rouses a sense of urgency [to please him], so too, when that bhikkhu thus recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, if equanimity supported by the wholesome does not become established in him, then he rouses a sense of urgency. But if, when he recollects the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha, equanimity supported by the wholesome becomes established in him, then he is satisfied with it. At that point, friends, much has been done by

that bhikkhu.

26] "Friends, just as when a space is enclosed by timber and creepers, grass, and clay, it comes to be termed 'house', so too, when a space is enclosed by bones and sinews, flesh and skin, it comes to be termed 'material form'.

27] "If, friends, internally the eye is intact but no external forms come into its range, and there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. If internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range, but there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. But when internally the eye is intact and external forms come into its range and there is the corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness.

28] "The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be is included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: 'This, indeed is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: "One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination." And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origination of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering. At this point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

29] "If, friends, internally the ear is intact but no external sounds come into its range, and there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. If internally the ear is intact and external sounds come into its range, but there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. But when internally the ear is intact and external sounds come into its range and there is the corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness.

30] "The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be is included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: 'This, indeed is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: "One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination." And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origination of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering. At this point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

31] If, friends, internally the nose is intact but no external smells come into its range, and there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. If internally the nose is intact and external smells comes into its range, but there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. But when internally the nose is intact and external smells come into its range and there is the corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness.

32] "The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be is included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: 'This, indeed is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: "One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination." And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origination of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering. At this point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

33] "If, friends, internally the tongue is intact but no external flavors come into range, and there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. If internally the tongue is intact and external flavors come into its range, but there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. But when internally the tongue is intact and external flavors come into its range and there is the corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness.

34] "The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging.

The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be is included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: 'This, indeed is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: "One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination." And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origination of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering. At this point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

35] "If, friends, internally the body is intact but no external tangibles come into range, and there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. If internally the body is intact and external forms tangibles come into its range, but there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. But when internally the body is intact and external tangibles come into its range and there is the corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness.

36] "The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be is included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: 'This, indeed is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: "One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination." And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origination of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering. At this point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu.

37] "If, friends, the mind is intact but no external mind-objects come into its range, and there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. If internally the mind is intact and external mind-objects come into its range, but there is no corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is no manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness. But when internally the mind is intact and external mind-objects come into its range and there is the corresponding (conscious) engagement, then there is the manifestation of the corresponding class of consciousness.

38] "The material form in what has thus come to be is included in the material form aggregate affected by clinging. The feeling in what has thus come to be is included in the feeling aggregate affected by clinging. The perception in what has thus come to be is included in the perception aggregate affected by clinging. The formations in what has thus come to be is included in the formations aggregate affected by clinging. The consciousness in what has thus come to be is included in the consciousness aggregate affected by clinging. He understands thus: 'This, indeed is how there comes to be the inclusion, gathering, and amassing of things into these five aggregates affected by clinging. Now this has been said by the Blessed One: "One who sees dependent origination sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent origination." And these five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen. The desire, indulgence, inclination, and holding based on these five aggregates affected by clinging is the origination of suffering. The removal of desire and lust, the abandonment of desire and lust for these five aggregates affected by clinging is the cessation of suffering. At this point too, friends, much has been done by that bhikkhu."

That is what the venerable Sariputta said. The bhikkhus were satisfied and delighted in the venerable Sariputta's words.

*Edited by KK  
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